DAFT PUNK - ALIVE

from TRAX July 2006

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Concerts, an odd movie, and best of all, miraculously, to our great delight, the two robots have rediscovered the ability to speak. Nearly ten years after their sensational invasion of the electronic scene, Daft Punk come to surprise us again. So much the better!

House nation. Chicago. "Da Funk". French Touch. *Homework*. Trax's history comes from here. It's curious that just a stone's throw from our hundredth issue in November 2006, these thoughts jolt our memories and shake up current events. Daft Punk, a duo symbolic of the first years of this magazine, finally decided to speak to us again. The wait was long but we were not disappointed. Of course, it's already baffling to interview two Frenchies in an impersonal hotel in Los Angeles when it's more logical to meet quietly on the banks of the Seine. Whatever, we're not going to hide our pleasure of having renewed ties with a major group — all styles included — who returns here after long hours spent on a tumultuous journey which, let's be honest, hasn't always rallied our votes, nor those of our readers. However, thanks to a dazzling live concept, Thomas Bangalter and Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo have made a shocking comeback that will bring together both underground fans of the first hour and supporters of the more universal Discovery period hits, under the sole banner of that famous house nation that many people had buried away. Never forget that history eternally repeats itself, and Daft Punk's history is not nearly finished. Maybe it hasn't even started.

What were you thinking about at Coachella right before going on stage for the first time in eight years?
Guy-Manuel: Since it was the first one, we just wanted to get all the way through the concert. *(laughs)*
Thomas: The last time was in December 1997. *(He thinks)* It's a show so you're excited, but at the same time nervous, a little scared. We were also happy to do a show again after all those years. As soon as we started, it brought me back to our previous live shows. It didn't feel like I hadn't done it for almost nine years. Plus it went well.

What made you return to the stage?
G-M: We worked a lot in Los Angeles on the videos for our last album and everyone there was telling us about Coachella. We always loved playing at festivals. That idea of going to see other groups, meeting lots of people, during the day and at night — it's a different vibe than going somewhere and playing from 10pm to midnight. Also it was very tempting to do concerts again with songs from the last two albums.
T: There was less pressure. We didn't tour after *Discovery* because it was an album that was complicated to produce and transpose on stage. These days we're at a moment where we have no obligations, no spotlights pointing at us, where finally no one is

expecting anything from us. The time had passed, and it was sort of fun to start over again.
G-M: And at the same time there was a good energy for the music and the visual concept of the show. We were inspired.

Where did you get the idea for the show?
G-M: Essentially from the music videos we made after *Human After All*. In "Robot Rock" there was already a big stage. In the second one, "Technologic", there was the pyramid.
T: We had already done tests with little old-fashioned animations that we didn't make for the videos. All of that preliminary work came from this idea of an electronic show with a mix between music and visuals. We didn't want to put on a TV show by just projecting content on screens like the Chemical Brothers and Basement Jaxx have done. We wanted to provide an environment where the public can really be "in" it.

A few weeks ago you released a "best of" album, *Musique, Vol. 1*. Is this a way of ending an era?
T *(thinking out loud)*: Is this a way of ending an era… ?
G-M: Not really.
T: Along with the concerts, this compilation is rather a way of bringing together all the elements of our music. The DVD also shows our progression and our desire as artists to reinvent ourselves both musically and visually. But we didn't really want to point the finger at ourselves, which is always kind of the case with this kind of "tribute" compilation. Basically the idea came from our record label. We didn't put any constraints on it, even if we're less and less interested in the music industry and economy. Today you can go on any paid download platform and make your own personal "best of" album.

You were known for your concern for independence in relation to your record label. Do you think that it's more difficult to be independent now?
T: The independence is still there. We still do what we want.

Thomas, you said once that the best way to change "superstore music" is to go into them. You've done it. Do you think you pulled it off?
T: Our aim has never been to go into the superstores, but we have never been against it. As soon as we made the music we wanted to make, it was not a handicap to go into this kind of place. If we thought otherwise, we would never have signed with a major. Maybe at times it's seemed like we've advanced things for others, but I realized that if it could help us in the not-so-distant future, then unfortunately it didn't open any doors. It's also true for radio stations. In the end, the doors close very quickly.

What would you say to those who have never gotten over *Homework*?
T: We have no interest in redoing *Homework*. It has a musical value for those people, but also in relation to the context of the era in which it was released. A track like "Rollin' & Scratchin'" can only be made once. It's sad to say, but that's how it is. *Homework* was a sort of virginity, we were lucky to be able to express that. Afterwards, we had to keep advancing.
G-M: Especially since as a point of principle we never do the same thing twice, so

things don’t look good for them. *(laughs)*

Starting from *Discovery*, do you think that a lot of people, including me, have judged your music too seriously, specifically based on the expectations created by *Homework*?

T: Each person reacts how they want to. In *Discovery*, there was a bit of spontaneity and also a provocation towards the “smart techno” or “purist” side. When *Homework* was released, it seemed like we were in an environment where people were very open-minded about electronic music, and then all of a sudden all these people put blinders on and ended up twice as narrow-minded as the guys who listened to rock. And that’s the point where we really didn’t see ourselves in that movement anymore. The “insider” or “underground” side of electronic music has never appealed to us. *Discovery* was childlike and rather unpolished. It was something very simple, unlike the trendy stuff. It was the theme of the album, actually. But it’s easier to talk about it now than in the moment.

You also wanted to produce a type of music that was not inspired by Detroit or Chicago…

G-M: We never wanted to make electronic music, but a type of music made with electronic methods. We loved house and we still like it, but our connection to music has always been more vast than just staying in a single style. Coming back to *Discovery*, we never think about what we’re doing in advance, it’s always spontaneous and intuitive, and *Discovery* is a trance, really free. Now it seems like the stages are restricted. People only listen, for example, to the sound from some club in Berlin or Frankfurt.

T: Yes, it’s become very specialized and that’s not how we think about this kind of music.

G-M: The idea of the track “Teachers” on *Homework*, where we name all those producers from different backgrounds, was rather to share all these influences and break down barriers.

T: *Discovery* is better accepted now than when it was first released. We spent a lot of time on that project and inevitably you cut yourself off from reality a little bit. We felt like we had an extremely generous attitude, like we were very open and very pure. It was the opposite of a commercial album. Also maybe we were screwing around…

Is the naivety you claim difficult to maintain over the years?

T: The third album does not have this naivety. It’s not “I Feel Good”, “everything’s fine”. More precisely, we didn’t try to maintain something that wasn’t there anymore. There might have been a minimalist naivety, but there wasn’t this optimistic aspect to it at all like there was on our first track when we were 18 years old. On the other hand, the spontaneity and the enthusiasm are always there.

It seems like you make music first for yourselves, and you couldn’t care less if afterwards people go along with it or not.

T: Yes, and with the last album it’s a bit like that.

G-M: Whether it’s in the artistic decisions we make or in dealings with our record company, we manage to be totally free. There are fewer people who go along with it, but for us, it’s the same as it was for our previous albums: we did what we wanted.

T: When you are a creator, it's the only way to not be disappointed. If you start making choices in advance, according to expectations, and it doesn't work out, what do you have left? Nothing. It's not that we don't care, it always makes us happy to be able to share something with people. We're pretty demanding and hard on ourselves. If we question ourselves, it's more likely to be related to our personal expectations rather than the reactions from critics or the public.

When *Human After All* was released you decided to no longer speak to the press. In the end we were disappointed to see that it was a fairly normal CD. More precisely, we didn't get a kick out of it…
G-M: Ah, shit… *(laughs)*
T: We weren't in a position to promote an album like that, which is what bothered us above all else.
G-M: If we had done 350 interviews like we did with the first two albums, it would have added up to more time than we devoted to the production of the album. It was kind of a burst, completed in two weeks. We had this need for urgency in comparison to *Discovery* which took more than a year to put together.
T: The theme of the album was dark, almost totalitarian. It was music that we wanted to make at that particular moment and not music that we wanted to sell. There was nothing to say about it.

All right, but as soon as you're part of the "system", there's still the expectation of the public and journalists who want to ask you questions…
T: We wanted to make an album in opposition to the star-system, something radical and honest and not following the logic that everything is economically bound. The record companies are breaking down due to the Internet, and our goal has never been to sell as many records as possible. We would have felt like we were compromising ourselves if we had made our record company happy by doing interviews. But it didn't please the journalists either…

Nor your audience…
T: It's true, once again we don't do things for the public. What we bring is our honesty and spontaneity. Right now we're in the middle of a discussion and we are at ease with this process. We feel like a part of our audience respects and appreciates this integrity.

Is the name Daft Punk too hard to live up to?
T *(reflective)*: I don't think so. Things are simple, we still follow a guiding principle. Seen from the outside, it can be said like this: "They put out this album, after that they release another completely different one and the two don't correlate." As if there were pauses. The idea of doing what we want at any time we want has been with us from the beginning. We were lucky. It's not when you start being successful that you're telling yourself: "Now we are free to do what we want." We liked this freedom, this absence of rules, this idea of doing things at home, without a sound engineer, as soon as we got into electronic music. We still have that frame of mind.

Now that you're over thirty, what has changed for you?
T: We're not 18 anymore, so it's no use trying to put ourselves into the mind of a

teenager, asking ourselves: "What does a guy like that want to listen to nowadays?" We don't do marketing or "panel things" to find out what young people or guys our age want to listen to. We don't know. We act in a very subjective way.
G-M: As soon as something comes up that we don't want to do, we try to sort things out so we don't have to do it. We're lucky. We know that…
T: We're very lucky…

These days, it feels like you are more interested in cinema than in music…
T: We still do concerts where music is important. (laughs) We are interested in both. Making our film *Electroma* reminded us of the spontaneity we had at the time of Homework — stepping into an area without really being familiar with it and doing things in a rather accidental way. We spent most of the year on this film. We've always been passionate about all forms of creation and notably images. We started with music and then we tried to make our visuals as important as our music. We were interested in going over to the "image" side and into the somewhat universal medium of cinema.

There's been a lot of talk these days about a new "French Touch" of which Pedro Winter, your manager, might be the new guru. What do you think about that?
(Coincidentally, Pedro opens the door at that moment)
G-M: Eh yes, look, it's the real guru, he has powers, he can hear through doors…
Pedro *(laughing)*: Ah no, that's not cool! *(he leaves)*
G-M *(surprised)*: Ah good, is it really the new "French Touch"? Well, it's been a year since I've really lived in France… but it's good. As long as it's not an empty moniker and it's not taken up by the media…

You're not aware?
T: Yes yes, we're aware…

Do you think that Para One, Justice, and other groups would be there without you?
G-M: Oh, they don't owe us anything.
T: It's pleasing, but I don't feel like these people are really inspired by us. On the other hand, if that's the case, the nicest gift they could give us is taking our approach and doing something else. When people like Para One, who appreciate us, say that we've meant something to them, it's touching and nice to hear.
G-M: And it's even better when it's good music.

Bonus question: have you gone to James Murphy's house yet?
T *(laughing)*: No, we've never been there. *(To Pedro, who comes into the room to signal that the interview is over)* And you? Have you been at Murphy's house?
P: Ah no, but he's been at mine.

Pedro 1 — Daft 0.

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In concert July 14th in Barcelona (Summercase), July 15th in Madrid (Summercase),

July 28th in Stratford (Global Gathering), and August 19th in Hasselt (Pukkelpop)

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ELECTROMA:
It’s a surprising film — we still don’t know three weeks after seeing it if it has the innocence of an asteroid fallen from the sky or the cynicism recycled from a gallery piece (and no doubt it’s both at once). Electroma, which resembles a lot of things, achieves this great feat, however it doesn’t seem like Daft Punk. Visually, it’s a nostalgic road movie where two robots (helmeted) traveling the Nevada desert in a car: ghost riders. They don’t say a word (we don’t want to play the same trick as Baudrillard but still: the desert is never the geographic area of inner silence), listening to Todd Rundgren, Eno, Linda Perhacs, and Jackson C Frank (but never a single song from our Laurel and Hardy of French Touch). On the way they will try to live undisguised (but why are they wearing faces from Guignols de l’info?), burn in the sunlight, and only find salvation in a ritualistic suicide. In its own way Electroma retraces the plot of all road movies. Zabriskie Point, Vanishing Point, Two-Lane Blacktop, and Gerry (that the film shows in a careful remake) follow this same arc: openness to others, failure, and death. But in the case of Daft Punk — the most adored and least reassured people in existence — how can we not take this homage (70s road movies: the remix project?) as something else: their very first confession without masks, for example. (PA)